Computer aided AFM imaging and recognition of 3D molecules

P. Hapala¹ F. Utirev¹ N. Oinonen¹ O. Krejci¹ F. Canova³ B. Alldritt¹
J. Kannala² P. Liljeroth¹ A. Foster¹,⁴,⁵

¹Department of Applied Physics, Aalto University School of Science
²Department of Computer Science, Aalto University, Finland
³Nanolayers Research Computing Ltd.
⁴WPI Nano Life Science Institute (WPI- NanoLSI), Kanazawa University, Kakuma-machi, Kanazawa 920-1192, Japan
⁵Graduate School Materials Science in Mainz, Staudinger Weg 9, 55128, Germany

In recent decade Atomic Force Microscopy with tip functionalized by carbon monoxide (CO) provided unique tool to experimentally image sub-molecular details of individual organic molecules [1], which is of great importance e.g. for on-surface chemistry. Most experiments are, however, up to now limited to flat aromatic molecules, due to difficulties with interpretation of highly distorted AFM images originating from non-planer molecules due to mechanical relaxation of tip or sample. These problems can be partially overcome using a simple mechanical model (Probe-Partilce Model [2]) which can reproduce those distortions, therefore simulate AFM images for given molecular structure. However, this still require laborious search for molecular structure which reproduces that particular experimental image. Instead we attempt to develop automatic tool to conduct inverse task – to recover molecular structure from given set of AFM images. Preliminary results suggests that convolutional neural network (CNN) [3] trained on simulated AFM images can learn this inverse mapping rather easily. Yet application of the method on real experimental data, and identification of atomic species remains to be a challenge.